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SUBJECT: TFH01: CHIEF OF DEFENSE ON THE SIEGE AT THE
BRAZILIAN EMBASSY AND THE POLITICAL CLIMATE

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 962

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Within the framework of Department guidance regarding contact with Honduran officials and military, the Ambassador spoke by telephone with de facto regime Chief of Defense MG Romeo Vasquez Velasquez on two occasions September 25 to discuss the situation at the Brazilian Embassy and the current political environment. The Ambassador said it was necessary for Vasquez and the Armed Forces (HOAF) to do everything they could toward achieving a peaceful solution to the political crisis. He expressed his appreciation to Vasquez for his efforts to ease the dire living conditions at the Brazilian Embassy for Zelaya's supporters and the embassy personnel inside, but noted the situation had gotten off to a bad start when utilities and phones were cut off in the first days.

¶2. (C) Vasquez strongly denied the Zelaya allegations that security forces had used gas or any other agent to sicken those inside, noting that such an act would be immensely foolish, especially on the same day the UNSC was meeting to discuss Honduras (septel will discuss the allegation in greater detail). Vasquez stated the allegations were a typical Zelaya tactic to make conciliatory gestures on one hand, while stirring up his supporters at the same time in order to pressure and discredit his opponents.

¶3. (C) Regarding the political climate, Vasquez said he was becoming more optimistic, noting that the September 24 meetings of the four presidential candidates with both de facto president Micheletti and President Zelaya had improved the climate. He said the images of the candidates reaching across the political divide to both sides had sent a very positive message to the Honduran people, and had a calming effect on the political climate. Vasquez said he had observed a softening on the part of the Micheletti camp as a result. He said he had attended a meeting September 24 that had included key Micheletti and Zelaya team members, including Micheletti negotiator Arturo Corrales and Zelaya supporter Carlos Reina. (Note: Reina is the son of Honduran UN PermRep Jorge Arturo Reina. End note) Vasquez said substantive discussions took place toward developing a "San Jose plus" agreement, and noted a second such meeting would take place later today. Vasquez promised to give the Ambassador a readout of the second meeting afterward.

¶4. (C) Comment: While we have no evidence to support Zelaya's

claims that de facto authorities were gassing the Brazilian Embassy, the de facto authorities have opened themselves to such attacks by besieging the embassy, cutting off utilities and blaring loud music and sub-sonic noise to create as difficult an environment as possible for those inside and pro-Zelaya protestors outside. The bulk of Zelaya's supporters on the street are poorly-educated and ready to believe such claims about the de facto regime, making Zelaya's tactic effective, if extreme. We plan to closely examine Zelaya's allegations that the military gassed the Brazilian Embassy and will report results septel. End comment.

LLORENS